

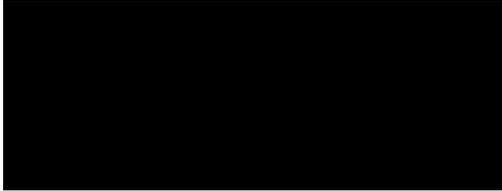


University of East Anglia

Information Compliance (ITCS)

The Library
University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7TJ
United Kingdom

Email: foi@uea.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0) 1603 593 523
Web: <http://www.uea.ac.uk>



07 May 2019

Dear

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Information request (ref: FOI_19-119)

We have now considered your request of 15 April 2019 for the following information:

‘How much money did the university spend on marketing activities related to student recruitment in each of the following years:

- 1) 2013-14
- 2) 2014-15
- 3) 2015-16
- 4) 2016-17
- 5) 2017-18’

We regret that on this occasion it is not possible to provide the requested information.

In line with section 17 of the Act, this letter acts as a Refusal Notice. The Act contains a number of exemptions that allow public authorities to withhold certain information from release. We have applied the following exemption to your request.

Exemption	Reason
s.43(2), Prejudice to commercial interests	Disclosure of information would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of a person as defined by the Act

Exemption explanation

Student recruitment is a commercial activity for all universities. The University’s success in recruiting students and the manner in which we do so, directly affects both our reputation and financial position.

The UK Higher Education sector is a highly competitive environment. Regulatory changes in recent years, such as the lifting of the cap on university places in England, have increased competition between institutions. Universities all seek to recruit the best students from a limited pool of prospective UK and international applicants

With regard to the requested information, UEA, in common with other universities, undertakes various advertising activities with the aim of promoting the institution to

our target markets, at home and overseas. This is a vital marketing activity that directly affects our ability to compete within the sector. Information about how UEA markets itself to potential students can therefore be seen as commercially sensitive.

There is a linkage between marketing expenditure and our ability to attract the desired number and quality of students. Awareness of an institution's course offering, academic reputation, and the local setting is key to any prospective student's decision to attend. The marketing materials available to any prospective student are critical to shaping such awareness.

Overall expenditure on marketing activities is regarded as a key indicator of our marketing strategy. The amount and manner in which we direct funding to create a comprehensive and engaging marketing strategy and organise our marketing activities provide us with a possible advantage compared to those competitors who undertake this activity less effectively.

In this respect overall expenditure is no different to specific budget lines as knowledge of the amount that UEA is committing to marketing activity allows competitors to understand the share of the market that we are looking to secure. If this information is combined with an analysis of our activity within search/social platforms, our competitors can establish what is required to increase their market share. If competitors knew gross budgets they could also come to conclusions about how aggressive UEA will be in the market, where they can or cannot compete, and therefore shape their activity (both digital and face to face marketing) to either challenge UEA's position or not and focus activity elsewhere.

Our Marketing department would certainly use such information from our competitors. We already have reason to believe that other institutions monitor our marketing activities and attempt to match or exceed them. It seems inconceivable that they would not use additional information in the same manner.

We do not share any details of our marketing funding with competitors and this pattern is consistent across the sector. For example, a recent FOIA request regarding marketing expenditure that was sent to all UK Higher Education institutions only garnered a response rate of 30%, with many institutions exempting the information as being likely to prejudice their commercial interests if released.¹

We believe it is likely that such prejudice to our interests would occur, given the treatment of the information as commercially sensitive, by not only UEA but other Higher Education institutions, and the degree to which the recruitment of the number and nature of applicants is now critical to any university's success.

The application of this exemption requires an examination of the public interest in disclosure as opposed to that in non-disclosure.

The factors in favour of disclosure would include:

- Increasing public understanding of the marketing expenditure of this University
- Enhancing the transparency and openness of the marketing process
- Increasing public confidence in the integrity and probity of the marketing process

Factors in favour of withholding the information are largely laid out in the explanation for the use of the exemption above, but would include:

- Protecting the ability of public authorities to compete on a level playing field

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/apr/02/universities-spending-millions-on-marketing-to-attract-students>

- Preventing a distortion of the advertising market for Higher Education recruitment that would have the potential effect of distorting the market for students amongst institutions.

After consideration of the above factors, we believe, on balance, that the public interest lies in maintaining in the exemption.

We are sorry we cannot provide the information you requested, but trust this letter explains our position. If you are unhappy with our response, you have the right to appeal against this decision. If you wish to appeal, please set out in writing your reasons for appealing and send to the above address. You must appeal within 40 working days of the date of this letter. In line with section 5.3 of the UK Government's Freedom of Information Act Code of Practice, we are not obliged to accept internal reviews after this date.

You also have a subsequent right to appeal to the Information Commissioner's Office. Further information is available on their website:
https://ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us, or by telephone on 0303 123 1113.

Please note that any material over which UEA has copyright is released on the understanding that you will comply with all relevant copyright rules regarding reproduction and/or transmission of the information provided.

Please quote our reference given at the head of this letter in all correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Dave Palmer
Information Compliance Manager
University of East Anglia